

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
PALLIATIVE CARE AND QUALITY OF LIFE
AUGUST 20, 2021**

Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
The RSA Tower, Suite 1586
Montgomery, Alabama

Members Present

Rodney O. Tucker, M.D., M.M.M., Chair
Karen Marlowe, Pharm.D., Co-Chair
Kristi A. Acker, D.N.P.
Gregory W. Ayers, M.D.
Stormy Dismuke, M.S.N.
Leigh Ann Matthews, M.S.N.
Timothy Mayhall, M.Div.
Leigh Ann Matthews, M.S.N.
Mary Ann Somers, M.A.Ed.

Members Absent

John G. Beard, M.B.A.
Richard J. Brockman, J.D.
Amy L. McAfee, M.S.W.
John P. Miller, M.D.

Staff Present

Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H., State Health Officer
Mary G. McIntyre, M.D., M.P.H., Chief Medical Officer
P. Brian Hale, J.D., Deputy General Counsel
Jacqueline Milledge, Bureau of Health Provider Standards (BHPS)
LaKesha Hopkins, BHPS
Shelia Rudolph, BHPS
Lisa Pezent, BHPS
Tonya Blankenship, BHPS
Leana Jo Rodgers, BHPS
Kierra Montgomery, BHPS

Guests Present

Mary Ann Crow
Angie Cameron Smith (Proxy for Richard J. Brockman)
Sarah Peterson (Proxy for Stormy Dismuke)

**CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES OF JUNE 26, 2020, NOVEMBER 13, 2020, AND
FEBRUARY 12, 2021:**

The Council recommended approval of the minutes of the June 26, 2020, November 13, 2020, and February 12, 2021, meetings as distributed; the motion carried unanimously.

COVID-19 UPDATE STATEWIDE STATUS:

Dr. Harris updated the Council on the havoc that COVID-19 has caused in the state of Alabama. He started by saying, “We are in a difficult situation statewide.” He also added, our state’s intensive care unit beds are maxed out; the state is averaging more than 4,000 new COVID-19 cases a day; we have seen double digit deaths for approximately 2 weeks straight; and there is literally nowhere for individuals to go for ordinary treatment such as a stroke, heart attack, or an automobile accident.

Dr. Harris said it is unclear as to when we will reach the top of the surge and stated, “We will have difficult days ahead.” He continues to spread the message on the importance of getting vaccinated. His advice to people, who are thinking about getting vaccinated or who wants to get vaccinated, is to speak with their physician or health care professional. Dr. Harris informed the Council, it is clear that health care professionals who people have a personal relationship with are able to communicate more effectively and are the “most effective” people in their lives.

OPIOID PRESCRIBING AND REGULATION UPDATES:

Dr. Gregory Ayers informed the Council that there is nothing new to report regarding opioid regulations. However, he did remind everyone that in the background of the pandemic is a continuing opioid epidemic. He stated that it is worse now than ever before. Dr. Ayers also provided the Council with data from 2020 that showed overdose hospital visits increased dramatically. In addition, he reported that overdoses from opioids have increased tremendously in the last year or so.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON PALLIATIVE CARE AND HOSPICE PATIENTS:

The Council members provided an update on the impact of COVID-19 which is continuing to affect their industries. They also provided updates on how they are coping with the changes experienced by their patients.

COVID-19 VACCINATION ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER:

Dr. Rodney Tucker presented a letter to the Council which strongly encourages members of hospice and the palliative care provider community to become vaccinated. He shared with the Council that 30 - 50 percent of the workforce is not vaccinated, which is a problem. He asked that everyone take a moment to review the memo and provide their opinion. No one opposed. Dr. Harris suggested that Dr. Tucker be “more forceful” in his wording. Dr. McIntyre agreed with Dr. Harris. Dr. Harris also pointed out the need to be very cautious when using such words as “mandatory” and “required.” An updated copy of the COVID-19 vaccination encouragement letter will be distributed after APDH’s Legal Department has reviewed and approved it.

OTHER ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:

The Council discussed the member terms and upcoming expiration dates. A new chair and co-chair will be elected at the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 5, 2021.

Rodney O. Tucker, M.D., M.M.M., Chair
State Advisory Council on Palliative Care and Quality of Life

Jacqueline D. Milledge, Acting Director
Bureau of Health Provider Standards
Alabama Department of Public Health

Approved November 5, 2021